

To all concerned,

I am a retired 20-year navy veteran. I am vehemently opposed to increased media consolidation. I have been in over 30 countries on five continents. As I traveled the globe, I took note of a benchmark of a truly free populace: How many bookstores? How many newspapers? What kind of movies? How many television/radio stations? And most importantly, who owns them? Centralized or diversified?

In publicly traded companies, operating margins are of paramount importance. I know, I work for a very large, publicly traded company. Meeting cost imperatives in order to maintain or increase margins is the way corporate America works. All too often, meeting cost imperatives that sub-optimize the value stream occurs every day in the business world. That may be ok if you're making toasters, socks, or pencils. Meeting your cost imperative in order to maintain your margins, that results in the sub-optimization of the first amendment to the constitution is obscene.

After attending the FCC town hall last night and listening to eight hours of impassioned testimony, one comment by a panel member sent shivers down my spine. She essentially stated that by owning multiple media outlets in eastern Washington, she could flip a switch and shape the market. She thought she was making her point on the benefits of increased consolidation, as her motives were altruistic; the ability to get the word out about a charity event. I have been in countries when the switch was flipped for other reasons. In the Philippines, the switch was flipped and Marcos came on the television and told his people, "Don't force my hand." Frightening.

Big corporations will be fine if the rules are not relaxed. Seven out of ten businesses in this country are sole proprietorships. Small, independent publishers and broadcasters are important bedrocks of this nation. We should be making it easier for their voices to be heard, not harder. Easing the rules moves us in a direction that history has proven to be destructive. This is not a matter of the ability of a media outlet to increase its product line in order to be competitive.

I have done the bidding for this country. I sleep well most nights, others I have trouble. Lately, I've been having a bit of trouble. The first amendment to the constitution is at literally at stake.